

and trees. If you have no such spot in your yard, you can improvise this year with hand built shelters, but you may want to think of planting trees or shrubery next spring to prepare for the following winter.

Food for thought

Just like the Eskimos who use the whale blubber for a multitude of purposes, you too can recycle the fat off your steak, bacon, chicken and other meats. This makes a delicious suet meal that the birds find hard to resist.

Save some small coffee cream containers or vegetable cans and pour pan drippings in these. Let the fat harden in the refrigerator. When the carton is full, hang it on a tree high enough so dogs and other four-legged creatures can't get at it. You'll be surprised at the number of birds that will enjoy this.

Sometimes you may have a big hunk or two of suet that you have cut off of a piece of meat before cooking. To serve that to the birds, it is best to place it in a fiber mesh bag. Fiber is best, as opposed to wire mesh screen, because the birds can sustain major injuries if their tongue or eyes touch the cold, frozen wire mesh, which often happens as they pick from the suet.

Or try using an old potato or other vegetable sack. Although the bags are quickly worn by the beaks pecking to retrieve the suet, they are easily replaced and cause little or no waste of suet.

It's fascinating to watch the different species of birds and how each one approaches the suet container. The downy wood peckers love suet and will visit the feeder many times during the day. Each time they approach, they act as if they have never seen the feeder



and will look it up and down and sideways analyzing each angle of attack. The chickadees and crested titmice are much more brazen in their approach and simply fly right up to the container and begin eating. They will eat until satiated, so that they don't have to make so many trips. Many times they will come in groups, first come first serve.

Making your own feeder for seed lovers

To make a feeding station start with a box that is 10"x 10"x 14 inches. Nail a wooden strip about two inches wide to the lower side of the open face of the box. Place seeds inside and hang the box on a tree limb with the opening facing south. This will keep the inside of the box dry, as most storms come from the north and west. Favorite seeds are sunflower, wheat and cracked corn. Any feeder with a roof will be much more serviceable and desired by the birds in poor weather. Open feeders with perches are often deserted during the winter as they will become ice covered and laden with snow.

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Quails like to hover together on the ground in winter, so you might want to provide a low shed among the bushes for shelter and food. These birds have a hard time finding food in the winter because of their instinct to stay close to the ground.

Planting the proper bushes

While it is a great idea to feed the birds, it is also a good idea to have some natural sources of food in the yard so that the birds won't forget their instincts to search for food and not become totally dependent on your contributions.

Bushes and shrubbery that are dense and produce everbearing berries are favorites of winter birds. Some of these are bittersweet, Indian Currant or coralberry, which have abundant masses of red berries. The Virginia Creeper or woodbine is good for nesting as well as for berries in the winter. Holly berries hang for most of the year as do rosehip berries. Other good sources of natural food are the greenbrier, pokeberry and wild sassafras bushes. Red cedar bushes and evergreen hedges are also favorites as the berries are everbearing and the dense branches provide shelter from the wind and snow. A small area of thick shrubbery can be a welcome sight to a bird struggling for survival against the harsh elements of winter.